

political movement to confiscate her property. This movement, in its primary stage of discontent at the wealth and abuses of the Church, may be traced farther back in the history of the century, but it had been for the first time brought into the region of practical politics by the support of John of Gaunt and his party. In 1371 the lines on which the struggle was to be fought had been laid down. The Bishops had been then turned out of lay office on the ground that they were churchmen, the Church had been heavily taxed, and bold words had passed among the Lords, declaring the right of those whose ancestors had enriched her to take back their charity when she abused it.¹ The nobility and gentry had a certain natural right to the endowments if any scheme of confiscation was carried out. The enormous wealth of religious bodies at this period was the result of a custom which had been in use for many centuries, and was still in vogue in Wycliffe's day, of bequeathing land or money to monasteries, churches, and chapels, to secure the repetition of masses for the soul of the donor. The wills of the period² show that numbers of lords and gentlemen, even at the height of the Lollard movement, died leaving something to the clergy for the good of their souls. Not only, therefore, was the memory of many grants to the Church quite fresh, but the process of endowment was still going on actively. In case of disendowment, an Earl or a Knight would of course put in his claim for lands or money of which he had been deprived by his grandfather's piety or his father's fears of purgatory. Even to the most democratic supporters of secularisation, this scheme was the only one that suggested itself as possible. * Take their lands, ye lords,' wrote the high-souled and visionary author of * Piers Plowman.' * Wycliffe himself saw no other plan except the restitution of the endowments to the classes that had enriched the Church, but he hoped that such a restitution would relieve the pressure of taxation on the poor.⁴ The idea of using the original endowments immediately for public objects, such as

¹ *Fasc. Z*, xxi.

² *Test. Vet.*; *Test. ISbor.* (Camden); *Inquisitiones ad quod damwmm Calendar.*

* *P. Pl.*, 0, xviii, 227.

* *Fasc. Z*, 268; *Triologiis* iv. cap. xix; *De Bias.*, 56, 198-9, 270-1,